

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 713

By Johnson

A RESOLUTION to recognize Citizens for Old Natchez Trace for their efforts to save and preserve segments of the Old Natchez Trace in Williamson County.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to recognize the unique history of this State and praise the efforts of those organizations that succeed in preserving our historical treasures; and

WHEREAS, the Natchez Trace followed a geographic ridgeline first tread by prehistoric animals from the dry ground between the salt licks of central Tennessee to the grazing lands southward, toward the Mississippi River; and

WHEREAS, numerous prehistoric indigenous Indian settlements are connected with the Natchez Trace; the Old Town Mississippian Indian mounds and many stone box Indian graves made of limestone lie under and alongside the path of the original Natchez Trace, where the Smithsonian Institute has uncovered artifacts at the Old Town Indian mound site that date from 900-1450; and

WHEREAS, early European explorers depended on the assistance of Native American guides, particularly the Choctaw and Chickasaw, to traverse the "miserable conditions" of the trail which was used for centuries by native people; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to connect the Mississippi frontier to settled areas of the country, in 1801, President Thomas Jefferson ordered the development and construction of a postal road between Nashville and Natchez, Mississippi; the United States Army and civilian contractors completed the road in 1809, and the Natchez Trace quickly became a vital trading route; and

WHEREAS, in the 1820s, steamboats revolutionized commerce and trade by providing more efficient, quicker, and cheaper means of transporting goods; with this, the Mississippi

River became the predominate trading route, and the Natchez Trace became less significant; and

WHEREAS, although the Natchez Trace lost its prominence, it remained to be the only reliable land link between the eastern states and the trading ports of Mississippi and Louisiana and continued to be a fundamental resource to the people living in its vicinity; and

WHEREAS, over time, sections of the Old Natchez Trace were converted to county roads for continued use; an original four-mile stretch of the Old Natchez Trace in western Williamson County, from Old Hillsboro Road to Sneed Road, remains an operational part of the county's road system; and

WHEREAS, last year, this original segment of the Old Natchez Trace, the oldest remaining operational road in the United States, was targeted for road widening and tree removal by the Williamson County Highway Department; and

WHEREAS, Citizens for Old Natchez Trace, an organization of citizens concerned with saving, preserving, and protecting this unique, historic road, joined together with the plea, "Help Us Save Old Natchez Trace, We Want it Paved in Place, Not Erased," in order to stop the county's road widening project, which threatened sensitive archeological sites and fragile landscapes; and

WHEREAS, this short four-mile piece of the Old Natchez Trace contains numerous National Historic Register sites, including Forest Home, Montpier, and Old Town, which includes the Brown House, the Old Town Bridge built in 1801 by United States soldiers, and the Old Town Mississippian Indian Mounds. Other historic sites include Stokely Davis House, Covington Farm, Old Natchez Trace, Knight-Moran House, Ash Grove, and the Daughters of the American Revolution stone monument commemorating the Natchez Trace; and

WHEREAS, the area is abundant in scenic treasures, both man-made and natural, that enhance the aesthetic beauty of this ancient river road, including significant sections of century-old dry stack stone walls, hedge rows, daffodils planted by the original residents, and trees that canopy the Harpeth River, protecting its water quality; and

WHEREAS, in 2001, Scenic America, a national organization dedicated to protecting natural beauty and distinctive community character, designated the landscape surrounding the Old Natchez Trace as a "Last Chance Landscape" and one of the Top Ten Most Endangered Places in America; and

WHEREAS, Williamson County Mayor Rogers Anderson, chairman of the Williamson County Highway Commission, agreed with the Forest Home community's requests to adopt and apply a sensitive repaving and restoration template to this historic treasure; and

WHEREAS, during the spring and summer of 2014, work will begin to pave the Old Natchez Trace and return the previously widened sections of the road back to its narrower width; the tree canopy will remain, and state archeologists will monitor the sensitive and culturally significant part of the Old Natchez Trace, where ground penetrating radar has revealed 182 prehistoric Indian grave sites alongside and under the existing roadbed; and

WHEREAS, this General Assembly finds it appropriate to pause in its deliberations to acknowledge and applaud this exemplary organization for their dedication to the State of Tennessee and its citizens; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that we recognize Citizens for Old Natchez Trace for working assiduously in their efforts to save and preserve segments of the Old Natchez Trace, which is an asset to Tennessee's heritage and deserves protection as one of the State's greatest historical treasures.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.